CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre Diary

The Scarecrow-Theatre de Lys 6/16/53. Second in series of 4 plays presented for 1 week each by Terese Hayden. Percy MacKaye's play was produced in NY in 1911, and has never been produced here since. Play is considered required reading in many college drama courses. Revival is staged by Frank Corsaro and features Patricia Neal, Eli Wallach and Douglas Watson.

Current Theatre Reviews

The International Set- Brandeis Festival 6/11/53 Dramatic reading of Louis Kronenberger's new comedy presented with an all star cast at Brandeis University Festival at Waltham,Mass, received mild approval from 2 of his colleagues. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun,found it peculiarly suitable for such a reading. Boston Post critic Norton, reporting in the NY Times,admitted that the general idea of the play,that of a billionaire collecting interesting people as a hobby, is exhilarating. But he feared the people collected seemed rather one dimensional in this reading. A second act play within a play he found apt,pertinent and highly amusing. Eric Bentley, New Republic critic staged the outdoor reading which featured Edna Best, Tom Helmore,Ian Keith, Mildred Natwick and Mildred Dunnock. Play is based on Kronenberger's novel "Grand Left and Right" and may be produced on Broadway this fall by Tom Hammond.

Maya- Theatre de Lys 6/9/53-6/14/53. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, sole daily critic to okay Terese Hayden's first downtown production. Rest of the reviewers panned Simon Gantillon's play detailing the life of a French prostitute as hopelessly out of date. There was mixed views on the acting, some crediting Helen Craig,Leo Penn, Kay Medford and John Randolph with fine performances, others fearing no one could handle their parts decently. Critics agreed that air-conditioning in small theatre, newly installed, didn't help the proceedings by breaking down. Atkinson,Times, and Watts,Post, noted that author's approach to prostitutes, a popular subject in literature was not especially original. First production of this play in New York in 1928 resulted in the police closing the theatre after the 15th performance. Times critic notes that current version would not alarm the sophisticated patrolmen of today,nor an audience either. World Telegram & Sun man disagreed. He okayed production because inspite of its shortcomings, it is done with dignity by some fine actors.

Hits Revisited

Guys and Dolls remains one of the genuine masterpieces of musical comedy history praises Hobe,Variety. Present company with only 5 principals from the original cast is naturally inferior in most instances to the opening troupe,he noted, but because musical is so clearly not a vehicle for any star,it holds up unusually well. Iva Withers was termed excellent, Julie Oshins satisfactory,Norwood Smith a better singer than Alda,and Susan Hight as good as Bigley...King and I remains in fine entertaining shape reports Sheaffer,Eagle. Musical remains Rodgers and Hammerstein's most charming work,critic believes...Porgy and Bess, with Lavern Hutcherson and Urlee Leonardos,the alternates to Leslie Scott and Leontyne Price, offer different interpretations,notes Vene,Variety. Hutcherson's crippled beggar is more dynamic,and his voice has a wider range, than Scott, while Leonardos creates a more sensuous Bess than Price, well acted and vocally effective.

Off Broadway

An Inspector Calls will be presented June 20 at Strauss Auditorium, 198 E. Broadway...Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d have contributed $2500 to Equity Library Theatre...American Lyric Theatre will present Where There's A Will and Brandy Is My True Love's Name June 17-21.

The Moon Is Blue opens the Subway Circuit June 23 at the Jamaica Theatre, Queens, and June 30 at the Brighton Theatre, Brooklyn...Amato Opera Theatre will play Fridays and Saturdays during the summer, starting June 26 with La Traviata.

The Penquin, new play by Norm Vein which was presented by the Players at Curren Stages pint sized theatre, was recommended as an above average off Broadway show by Rice, Post. As a new exponent in the grunt and groan school of playwriting, Vein cannot be lightly dismissed, noted the drama editor. Author has enough individuality in his style to indicate that as soon as he passes through "the artist's life" phase and gets more experience, he could write an interesting play. Actors, all of whom take their roles as unhappy Greenwich village characters seriously, turn in a fine job.

The Plough and the Stars, produced at the Cherry Lane by Trio Productions, is given a loyal revival, estimates Hewes, Saturday Review. John Scanlon and Barbara Winchester stand out, while the rest of the company is adequate though spotty.

Vaudeville

Harry Savoy heads the new Palace show, with Marie Louise, Carla and Fernando, Ross Wyse, Jr, June Mann, Joe Morris, Barbara Barry and The Workmans.

Paramount show of 3 record stars okayed by tradepaper reviewers. Vic Damone, Karen Chandler and Richard Hayman plus comic Joey Bishop provide a entertaining session, agree Smith, Billboard, and Gros, Variety.

Theatre Book Comment

"In Search of Theatre" by Eric Bentley (Knopf) recommended by Gassner, Saturday Review, as one of the best books about the problems and possibilities of the stage in recent years. Should the American theatre reach the point at which it can move forward rather than backward, the reviewer believes, Bentley will surely be one of its leaders. Present book is collection of previously published magazine articles that deserves to be studied and cherished.

"Just The Other Day" by Ward Morehouse (McGraw Hill) thoroughly enjoyed by Lockridge, Herald Tribune, though he did list a few minor complaints. Lockridge wished that Morehouse had managed to bring Charles Richmond more vividly alive. Critic enjoyed chapter on Gertrude Lawrence the best.

"With A Quiet Heart" by Eva LeGallienne (Viking) should be read by everyone interested in the modern stage, raved Burr, Playbill. Even for a casual theatre addict the book is a constant delight, crammed with straightforward inside stories of her productions, he noted.

"Modern Drama" by Martin Lamm, and translated by K. Elliott (Philosophical Library) is useful, suggests Hewes, Saturday Review, in that it depicts some familiar ground with a somewhat different perspective than we are accustomed to. Swedish professor discusses the plays and playwrights which interest him.

Gift Coupon

Buy theatre wisely. Weekly newsletter digests NYC theatre reviews, comments, news, 5th year. Ratings NYC critics-ON-Off Broadway. Drama books & Drama records. Ticket reports-current & advance mail order, agency, box office data. Summer features. $10 year. $25-3 one year gifts.

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Green Room Department

PRO CRITIC & PRODUCERS...Feeling in theatre circle is that wide coverage of various types by Atkinson,Times, and in different places, is a constructive force for the stage, Variety reports. Not only because of the prestige of the Times,trade paper notes, but because of Atkinson's respected position and his proven readership his coverage of off the beaten path activities around US inspires the groups he covers...Producers cannot fairly be blamed by critics if there isn't the material ready for them to experiment with, points out Nathan,Journal American. In many cases,he detailed, producers of entirely honest intentions are hamstrung by playwrights who do not live up to promies to finish plays on time, by actors who are not ready to begin work when they promised, by backers who walk out at the last minute.

COLUMN TIPS...Latest word from Washington, hears Kilgallen, is that the 20% amusement ticket tax will be cut in half...Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, and his brother have paid a half million dollars to set up a TV station in Wilmington,Del,reports O'Brian,Journal American.

DATED THINKING...Whether the present building code is essentially a 19th century theatre bill is a debatable question, states Times editorial. But there is no doubt that our entire thinking regarding the construction, the paper comments, of new playhouses has been out of date. With the new bills a play producer will have at least some of the privileges now given night clubs. The editorial looks forward to the day of more theatres and a more prosperous show business.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Sheaffer,Eagle,can't help thinking that the casting of Lawrence Tibbett in 10 performances of Porgy and Bess this summer smacks more of a stunt than a valid artistic experiment. Critic can't believe that Tibbett's acting will harmonize perfectly with the Negro performers...If it weren't for TV,the average competent non star stage performer would probably starve,argues Gross, News.

FUTURE AUDIENCES...Isn't it about time our theatre started wooing the young of our country, asks Coleman,Mirror. Actors' Equity 15¢ matinees of hits for grammar and high school kids several years ago was a step in the right direction. Critic urged League of NY Theatres and unions to promote theatre by all star classical revivals and some all star vaudeville shows.

MAIL BOX...In answer to Kerr,Herald Tribune,recent article on the dearth of balcony ticket patrons, a dozen readers offered the following reasons: balcony prices too high, actors cannot be heard there, can't plan so far in advance,brush offs at box office,too old to walk up 3 flights,music louder than actors in musicals, can only hear 1 out of 10 words!

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...I wanted people to know I was still alive is the reason Billie Burke, who has been an actress for 51 years, is making her summer theatre debut this season in Life With Mother at the Pocono Playhouse,Pa, Allison, Herald Tribune learned. She fears that the public has seen her in so many old movies on TV that they think she must be dead. Actress hoped aloud that some one will find her a play for NY next fall.

Pros & Cons by T M K

The invention of really noiseless air-conditioning units for NY theatres is a necessity. Unless this can be solved no one will attend summer productions, in new or old buildings.

NYC Center Fund ad takes a curious moral slant with its headline "Skip just 1 cocktail and send $1 or more to NYC Center." Which leaves out all those who don't drink and those who do drink and want to contribute.

NYC Theatre News Round Up

More jobs for actors was deemed more important than a stiffer anti communism policy by the majority of the membership voting in Actors' Equity annual election. The regular slate of candidates which campaigned that unemployment was the major problem facing union membership beat the insurgent group which demanded a stricter anti-Red statement. Controversy resulted in the second largest vote in the organization's history with 1776 ballots cast. 16 members of the regular ticket were voted into office, with only Thomas Mitchell and Lois Wilson of the insurgents winning seats on the council. Stage manager Bill Ross was elected second vice president for a 2 year term.

Plays

South Pacific will re-open June 29 at the Broadway, one week later than planned ...Time Out for Ginger closes June 27 at the Lyceum after 247 performances...The Crucible and Misalliance are now operating with 2-for-1 tickets which are being distributed to college students and organizations...Though Me and Juliet didn't fare any better from the weekly drama critics than it did from the daily reviewers, Rodgers and Hammerstein continue to report sell out houses. NBC, whose brother corporation RCA is the main investor in the musical with a $200,000 stake, is plugging the show on both TV and radio...Japan's famed Kabuki Theatre, which Paul Green has called the only true folk theatre in the world, is being sought for a Broadway visit in 1954 -55 by Josh Logan and Sol Hurok...British mystery play Murder Mistaken by Janet Green has been booked to open at the Playhouse Oct 26...Sherlock Holms, which press agent Bill doll is producing in October with Basil Rathbone in the title role, will use "The Baker Street Suite" by Harvey Officer as its overture.

People

Leo de Lyon, night club comedian, is making his Broadway stage debut replacing Larry Blyden as "Itchy" in Wish You Were Here ...Frances Bethencourt has replaced Anthony Dawson in Dial M For Murder...Lawrence Tibbett will make 10 guest appearances as "Porgy" inPorgy and Bess this summer...Betty and Jane Kean, who are now starring at London's Palladium, have been signed by Jule Styne for a new musical by Anita Loos, based on the soon to be published book of the same name "The Great Caress" by Federico Palavancini...David Wayne has been signed to play the role of the comic Japanese interpreter in Maurice Evans producing of The Teahouse of the August Moon... Mickey Rooney and Eddie Bracken have signed to appear in Fred Finklehoffe's new musical Anchors Aweigh...3 famous actors died this week. Roland Young at age 65, William Farnum at age 76, and Godfrey Tearle at age 68.

Theatre TV & Radio Notes

Don't miss June 15 CBS NBC TV Ford Anniversary 2 hour all star program which will include duets by Ethel Merman and Mary Martin, staged by Leland Hayward... "ANTA Showcase" program being prepared by Vinton Freedley for TV next season..."Literary Greats", new ABC radio Tuesday program, features famous authors reading from their plays,poems and stories. First program included Tennessee Williams and Dylan Thomas..."Be An Angel" TV series packaged by Richard Lukin plans to present on the air auditions of prospective show for investors...Mike Todd is again considering TV theatre closed circuit production of his outdoor Jones Beach show A Night in Venice. Deal was set for final performance of last season, but was cancelled due to union difficulties.

Theatre Film Notes

Julius Caesar-MGM film opened 2-a-day run at Booth Theatre on Shubert Alley to a set of rave notices...London's Drury Theatre,which has been in operation since 1663,is seen in MGM" Never Let Me Go.